



The Farnham Society

Planning Committee

Report to Annual General Meeting 2021.

The Woolmead

As reported at the last AGM, the application by Berkeley Homes to amend the previously granted planning consent for the construction of a 138-dwelling block of apartments so as to reduce the number of car parking spaces within the building's basement from 141 to 80, was refused by Waverley Borough Council (WBC) on 1st July 2020. However, an appeal was lodged by Berkeley Homes. We submitted a strong objection to the Inspector but on 28th May 2021 he decided to allow the appeal. Some may of course welcome this decision as they are in favour of forcing residents to walk and cycle rather than own a car. We believe that this decision will create additional car parking problems in Farnham town centre but will of course increase the profitability of the development for Berkeley Homes.

Land at Coxbridge Farm

We continued to liaise with the landowner at Coxbridge Farm where a planned development of 320 dwellings (including 96 affordable) was given Outline Planning Permission on 18th May 2021. We support the concept of building on this site which is an important element in the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and the WBC Local Plan targets for housebuilding numbers. We are still much concerned about the likely quality of design of housing and the materials to be used, which matters are yet to be confirmed in the detailed planning application yet to be submitted.

The Bush Hotel

We were given the opportunity by the owner and developer of The Bush Hotel to comment on the design proposals (prior to planning application) for the redevelopment of The Bush which has been a key element in the life of Farnham for many centuries. Overall, we support the final design although there are some elements which we remain concerned about. Given the historic nature of the buildings and the site there was always likely to be difficulties in integrating the old and new. The planning applications to WBC were granted full approval on 4th August 2021. We welcome this much needed investment in The Bush Hotel and look forward to it re-establishing its significant role in the town.

Farnham Conservation Area

The town centre Conservation Area was designated in 1970 and was followed much later by the WBC led Conservation Area Appraisal of 2005, which The Farnham Society was deeply involved in producing. The Appraisal became a WBC Supplementary Planning Document in the same year and in 2012, the Farnham Conservation Area Management Plan (FCAMP) was produced, again with substantial input from the Society. With all of this focus on our wonderful historic town one might have thought that it would be well protected from damage caused by inappropriate development, poor use of materials and erosion of the quality of the shopfronts, buildings and public spaces. This has not proved to be the case, however. The reason for this is the fact that apart from the protection provided to listed buildings under planning law, all other buildings and spaces in the Conservation Area have little or no special protection from development blight.



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The remedy for this situation has always been the power that our local council has to apply for Article 4 Directions over the whole Conservation Area, as have very many councils across the country (Guildford being a prime example). Such Directions can require that all developments in the Conservation Area be subject to a planning application or adherence to design guides set by the council. Waverley Borough Council has never sought to impose such a Conservation Area wide Article 4 Direction. We think this has been a major failing which should now be rectified despite the fact that central government has recently made it more difficult to do so. The Farnham Centre Conservation Area is under attack from developers seeking to use whatever loopholes they find. Some of this may be needed and some may be well considered and well-designed but much of what we see is not.

Consultations

During the year, the Planning Committee has undertaken a great deal of work in responding to national and local government consultations. In particular we have responded to the very time-consuming consultation on the central government **Planning for the Future White Paper** with its very controversial plans for zoning and housing number allocations (including the notorious algorithm) together with the parallel and much more welcome **National Model Design Code and Design Guide** and revisions to **The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**.

Other consultations include the **WBC Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2)** which we responded to in January 2021, but which has now been reissued for further consultation to be concluded in November 2021. This is a very important document as when it is accepted by central government, it will set not only revised planning policies for Waverley but also the numbers and locations of approved housing and other developments across the Borough, with the exception of Farnham, and will incorporate the **Farnham Neighbourhood Plan** which is already approved but parts of which will become less effective from April next year if the **WBC LPP2** is not completed.

We have also responded to the consultations on the **Farnham Infrastructure Plan**.

Conclusion

The Planning Committee has probably attempted to undertake too much over the last few years, and this has been very taxing on members.

We have therefore decided to concentrate our efforts on the larger developments affecting Farnham and on the Conservation Areas together with fulfilling our consultation responsibilities and maintaining our cooperation and communication with Waverley Borough Council Planning officers who have been working under considerable pressure for some time.

As ever our focus is the preservation of what we have and the design of beautiful buildings and social environments for the future.

The Planning Committee